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STATE PASS USTR FOR AUSTR WEISEL AND DAUSTR DBELL
COMMERCE FOR JBAKER

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SUBJECT: SINGAPORE AMENDS PHARMACISTS REGISTRATION ACT

11. (U) Singapore's practice of allowing physicians to both dispense and prescribe pharmaceuticals remains unchanged in spite of recently approved modifications to the Pharmacists Registration Act. The Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America (PhRMA) has consistently opposed Singapore's system. In comments submitted as part of the 2007 Special 301 Review, PhRMA argued that Singapore's system can lead to inefficiencies and conflicts of interest.

12. (U) Minister of Health KHAW Boon Wan defended the current scheme under questioning during a September 20 session of Parliament. He cited convenience and physicians' ability to offset consultation fees by selling pharmaceuticals as benefits in support of the practice. Editorials in the Straits Times newspaper, which has close ties to the government, echoed support for the status quo. In Asia, economies such as China, Hong Kong, Malaysia, Taiwan, as well as Singapore, allow physicians to prescribe and dispense, while Japan and Korea disallow it.

13. (U) The revised legislation introduces four principal changes:

--Mandatory continuing education requirements;

--Creation of three categories for registration -- Full, Conditional, and Temporary -- in order to speed up the employment process for foreign-trained pharmacists;

--A Specialists Register, which will aim to encourage more pharmacists to take up advanced training in specialty areas; and

--Creation of the Singapore Pharmacy Council (to replace the Singapore Pharmacy Board), which will administer the new provisions as a statutory board under the Ministry of Health.

SHIELDS